Opening Statement of the Honorable Lee Terry
Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade
Hearing on "Our Nation of Builders: Training the Builders of the Future"
November 15, 2013

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Welcome to today's hearing — the sixth installment in our Nation of Builders series.

The subject matter we will be discussing today brings together a common thread that appeared in almost all of our manufacturing hearings: the demands that our manufacturing renaissance is placing on our workforce — especially workers trained in science, technology, engineering and math — is resulting in a current and future shortfall of workers.

Several witnesses testified — whether it was the local foundry or Toyota — that they are having problems finding skilled workers with the requisite STEM skills to fill 21st century manufacturing jobs. More concerning was the fact that many of these companies said the problem only gets worse in the future. If the United States cannot supply the type of labor needed to fill these good jobs, these companies may choose to operate in a nation that can. When a company cannot find the workers it needs to fill certain jobs, we are hamstringing productivity, potential for growth, and competitiveness.

According to the Manufacturing Institute, STEM jobs are projected to grow by 17 percent between 2008 and 2018. Fifty-six percent of manufacturing executives already believe that the skilled workforce shortage we are experiencing will increase over the next three to five years, culminating in a projected shortage of as many as 700,000 unfilled skilled jobs by 2020.

The good news is that this problem hasn't gone completely unnoticed. As many as 252 STEM education activities or programs are currently being run by several different federal agencies. Yet we are still facing a reality where technology companies like Microsoft cannot find trained computer technicians and the local foundry in Omaha cannot fill openings it has for welders. Clearly there is work to be done.

As Dr. Hill aptly points out in her testimony, many of these STEM jobs are "middle-skill" jobs that require more than a high school education but less than a bachelor's degree. And on average, these middle skills jobs earn 40 to 60 percent more than non-STEM positions. The same distinction is true for other STEM workers, who earn 26 percent more than their respective counterparts. These are good jobs that provide employees great benefits, and ample on the job training so they can keep moving up in the 21st century economy.

Congress needs to come up with fresh ideas on how we can continue to train the next generation of builders, programmers, manufacturers, technicians and entrepreneurs. There is surely going to be more than one answer, and working with the private sector to leverage our potential will be a must.

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